wis lawas, kon ora dadi karo nyong?

elsewhere. I've been a customer for a very long time; why do you quibble with me?

(The seller had agreed to sell the lighter pot for Rp. 11,000, but then agrees to the buyer's request that he get the better pot for Rp. 11,500.)

S. *Sampeyan wis murah karo nyong.*

You've got a cheap price from me.

B. *Janji niku dienggo sepisna borot kula mbalekaken. Nek borot kula buang. Kula tutor maleh. Saniki kula kantun tumbas kendel. Kula isih butuh kendel gede. Kula gadah kendel gede.*

I promise you this, if I use it once and it develops a leak I'll return it to you. If it has a leak in it I'll throw it away and fetch another. Now all that remains is to buy a different kind of pot. I have a large pot. (This passage is delivered in a joking manner.)

B's daughter

Kendel gede nggo jangan tewel ora maen!

Large pots are no good for cooking unripe jackfruit!

(There is general laughter from all the nearby sellers as well as the three buyers. All shake hands and take their leave.)

S. *Kesel, kesel banget!*

How tired I am!

(The above *dandang* weighing 28 metric ounces was sold for Rp. 11,500. Bu Bariyah's husband had sold another of the same weight and similar quality earlier in the morning, for Rp. 16,000, which was the top end of the current range.)

File 356
acc. 2375

THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET: RITUAL AND GENDER IN TURKISH ISLAM

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The anthropology of Islam has for too long been dominated by dichotomies such as 'orthodox'/'popular', and by a presumption that Muslim women are subordinate in religious as in other matters. The religious activities of men cannot be explained solely in terms of their degree of 'orthodoxy', and those of women should not be dismissed *a priori* as peripheral to those of men. These propositions are supported by an analysis of men's and women's *mevlûd* recitals in a Turkish town. In Turkey, where the state has limited men's public religious activities, the central religious mystery of salvation is celebrated particularly in the women's *mevlûds* through a particular construction of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It is argued that an intrinsic relation between gender and religious orthodoxy is characteristic of practised Islam everywhere, and that the elucidation of this relation must be central to any anthropology of Islam. Such a perspective may also stimulate investigations of the relation between Islam and other religious systems. Here we suggest various transformational relations, for example between the treatment of Muhammad in the *mevlûd* and certain Christian constructions of Jesus.

One central problem in anthropology is the choice of terms that can be used to analyse different cultures and bring them into a frame in which they can be both explained and compared with each other. The futility of attempting universal definitions of terms such as 'kinship', 'marriage', or 'religion' is now widely accepted: it is not so much that these terms can have only a loose analytical value as 'polythetic classes' but that they do not translate any significant categories in many cultures: they have no 'meaning' and distort or disregard indigenous categories that do. This theoretical liability has been side-stepped by a succession of fashionable anthropologies, such as a variety of structuralisms, historical particularism, or semantics and hermeneutics, either seeking universal 'elementary structures', 'structural principles' or 'primary factors' at the expense of the complexities of cultural categories, or giving primacy to indigenous systems of meaning and denying the possibility or desirability of explanation and comparison.

The problem is essentially one of translation, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that numerous cultures *do* include categories that translate easily into English terms once favoured as analytical concepts. This ease is of course

deceptive and brings its own difficulties, which have indeed inhibited their study by anthropologists. An important example is that of 'religion' in the Muslim Middle East. Leaving aside the substantive differences between Islam and Christianity as 'religions', we find that, as with glosses on 'religion' in English (and Christianity generally), Muslim understandings of 'religion' (*din*, Islam) vary from the highly exclusive to the all-inclusive. Many Muslims (the more theologically inclined) tend to define their religion as pillars of faith, prescribed duties, laws and traditions, expressly excluding a whole range of 'unorthodox', 'popular' beliefs and activities which anthropologists (and other Muslims) might want to call 'religious'. On the other hand, believers may also insist that all their beliefs and actions are motivated and governed by 'religion'. This ambiguity of definition in the case of the study of Islam has long allowed a monopoly by a theory of 'orthodoxy'.

Another dimension of the issue, common to other world religions, is the co-existence of universalistic and particularistic elements in Islam. Earlier formulations of this distinction, in terms of a dichotomy between Great and Little Traditions, both oversimplified the complexity of each such tradition and overstressed their separation (cf. Eickelman 1981: 202–3). This dichotomy too easily slips into other dubious dichotomies favoured by writers on the Middle East: Great is to Little as literate elite is to illiterate masses, urban is to rural, intellectual to emotional, public to private, male to female, and so on (cf. Stirrat 1984: 205 sqq.). The religious 'great tradition', guarded by the urban, literate elite, is seen as a sober, intellectual matter, everywhere the concern of men; the religions of the 'little tradition' are emotional if not ecstatic, common among illiterate rural communities, and particularly the concern of women (cf. Gellner 1968; Spooner 1972). These associations are misleading and often false, but they remain persuasively simple and continue to exercise a strong influence on studies of religion in the Middle East.

Such studies have long been dominated by the assumptions and methods of orientalists and theologians, which privilege the exclusive and universalistic elements of Islam and focus on the nature and explicit meanings of a presumed unity of orthodox beliefs and practices, dismissing 'popular' Islam as peripheral, unimportant, incorrect. This is evident even in more recent discussions, such as that of Denny, who rightly insists that Islamic ritual be treated in context using normative and descriptive data, yet persists in generalisations which reveal a bias towards notions such as 'orthodox' or 'authentic' Islam (1985: e.g. 73, 76). Nor have ethnographers, for their part, escaped the tyranny of orthodoxy: they have tended to treat the rites and dogmas of the Islamic 'great tradition' as an accepted central set of norms and principles, where the only interest is in describing and explaining deviations from them,[1] and thus have focused attention on particularistic 'popular' elements such as Sufism, saints, shrines and spirits (e.g. Geertz 1968; Gellner 1969; Gilsenan 1973). The study of the practice and meaning of ordinary, day-to-day practised Islam, which inevitably combines both 'orthodox' and 'popular' elements, has been neglected as straightforward and lacking in theoretical interest. Neither, of course, could be further from the truth.

An anthropology of Islam

Ten years ago, in an excellent 'state of the art' paper on the anthropology of the Middle East, Antoun offered cogent reasons why anthropological studies of Islam were so poorly developed and why such studies as there were made so little impact outside the area (1976; see also El-Zein 1977 and Digard 1978). Seeking strategies for remedying the situation, Antoun noted four directions an anthropology of Islam might take: the collection of data on the local level, particularly details about prayers, sermons and formal ceremonies; the study of the competition and accommodation which occurs between the different great traditions found in particular settings; the analysis of texts; and the study of Islamic movements as informal interest groups. Reviewing the literature on Middle Eastern women in the same year, Van Dusen (1976) emphasised the need for synchronic and diachronic comparative studies of women, both in regional terms and in terms of the women within particular local communities.

In the decade since these two papers, the anthropological literature on the Middle East has expanded considerably. There have been notable accounts both of practised Islam (e.g. Fischer 1980; Gilsenan 1982; D. Eickelman 1976; 1981; 1985) and of women (e.g. Beck & Keddie 1978; Dwyer 1978; Wikan 1982; C. Eickelman 1984; Abu-Lughod 1986). But as yet there have been few detailed or penetrating studies of the relation between Islamic orthodoxies and gender with a focus broad enough to cover both Antoun's and Van Dusen's suggestions. Without such studies, it seems we cannot yet speak of an 'anthropology of Islam'. Only when a perspective linking gender and religion is firmly established will an anthropology of Islam—that is, comparative studies of different Muslim communities—become possible and interesting to a wider audience.[2]

A major advantage of such a perspective is that it can expose two prevailing misconceptions about practised Islam. The first of these, in the orientalist tradition, is represented by Graham's view (1983) that there is a contradiction between Islam as one of the most ritualistic of all traditions and its institutionalised anti-ritualistic attitudes. Graham's aim is cross-cultural or pan-Islamic and his central argument is that 'the distinctive ritual life of Muslims and the fundamentally ritualist orientation of Islam' may be found in the study of orthopraxy, especially of the major ritual duties, Koranic recitation and the invocational formulas which punctuate everyday life. Certainly such duties form the universally recognized backbone of Muslim practice; they are the activities to which every generation of Muslim thinkers have applied their minds in order to delineate for themselves and their fellows what it means to be a Muslim' (1983: 63), but, by seeking 'the most consistent self-image of Islam' in 'these central practices' (1983: 63), Graham's emphasis is inevitably on the explicit versions of Islam propounded as orthodoxy by local religious establishments.

Today it is an anthropological commonplace to suggest that such explicit meanings are everywhere qualified and understood in terms of other, implicit meanings with which they are associated in any particular community. In this

consider the 'more popular areas of Muslim practice [which do not] give us significant—or certainly not the most significant—access to the striking and even unique character of Islam as a coherent tradition of faith and practice' (1983: 63). Graham's argument runs counter to the holistic anthropological premiss which insists that understanding depends on consideration of *all* the various beliefs and practices of a single community, and that useful cross-cultural comparisons depend on such holistic studies.

Just because there is often so little ambiguity in the eyes of a religious establishment about the subordinate role of Muslim women in religious matters, their experiences may remain relatively autonomous of men's and of articulated interpretations of prevailing orthodoxies. We do not suggest that women and men necessarily have discrete systems of belief and practice (the opposite is suggested by the Turkish material examined below), but that different aspects of a religious system may be the province of one sex or the other, and an understanding of any particular Islamic tradition depends on examining *both*.

This first kind of misconception about the practice of Islam not only implicitly misrepresents gender roles but appears to lead to a further more explicit kind of misrepresentation, in this case drawn from the anthropological tradition: in Davis's words, 'Muslim men are expected to be more devout than Muslim women'; 'religious work is chiefly entrusted . . . to men' who 'secure the well-being of Muslim communities' and 'the spiritual security of their households' (1984: 21, 23). Davis acknowledges the Ferneas' observations that, on the one hand, there is little evidence about the spiritual lives of Muslim women, and, on the other, that the sexual segregation of religious activities and women's absence from public acts of worship mean that 'the religious activities of Muslim women have varied considerably from place to place' (Fernea & Fernea 1972: 386, quoted in Davis 1984: 19), but he preempts further insights by continuing, 'public religious activity is perhaps an even more important component of the spiritual life in Islam than it is in Christianity' (1984: 20). With Graham, Davis seems to share an understanding of Islam dominated by men's view of 'proper' religious activities and male stereotypes of the place of Muslim women in this schema.

We would argue rather differently. We maintain on the one hand that men's day-to-day observance of apparent 'orthodoxy' is far from unproblematic, and on the other that it is wrong to assume *a priori* that women's religious 'work' is less important than or peripheral to that of men. Not only do women too practise the central, day-to-day rites of Islam, but in their performances they may carry a religious load often of greater transcendental importance to the community than that borne by men.[3] We maintain that any anthropology of Islam will be inadequate unless it gives full consideration to both women's and men's religious ideas and practices and the relation between them.

In this article we demonstrate these points through a preliminary analysis of rituals we attended in Eğirdir, a market town in Isparta province of southwest- [illegible] women's and men's versions of the same

questions about the character of Islam in Turkey, specifically concerning the historical relation with Christianity and the contrasts and similarities between popular Muslim conceptions of the Prophet Muhammad and Christian conceptions of Jesus. Our argument touches on many other topics too, but our present aims (and space) are limited. We concentrate on the ritual unit of the *mevlûd* service *per se* and seek to explain the variety of such services held in the town. As far as we are aware, the Turkish *mevlûd* services have not been described sociologically in any detail.[4] This neglect is surprising given the frequency and prominence of these services in religious and social life throughout the country; it hints at their fundamental, if covert, role in the construction of the social order and, in any case, certainly deserves to be corrected.

The mevlûd

In many parts of the Muslim world, a central feature of the celebrations of the Prophet's birthday is the recitation of *mevlûd* (Arabic *mawlid*), 'panegyrical poems of a very legendary character, which start with the birth of Muhammad, and praise his life and virtues in the most laudatory fashion' (Fuchs 1961: 366–7). In Turkey today, as in the past, the best-known and most socially important of the *mevlûd* poems is that of Süleyman Çelebi, written around A.D. 1400. The poem is no longer associated only with the anniversary of Muhammad's birth; rather, recitals have become the central part of a religious service that may be held at any time of the year and in many different social contexts. Indeed, *mevlûd* recitals are among the most prominent of all religious services in contemporary Turkey. They are also the focal ritual in what might be called the cult of the Prophet Muhammad, which in many ways qualifies, if not dominates, popular Turkish Islam (cf. Fallers 1971: 12). In the introduction to his translation of the poem, MacCallum notes that although Süleyman Çelebi was a contemporary of Chaucer, his *mevlûd* 'still speaks to the heart of the common people of Turkey' in the same way that 'the accounts of the birth of Jesus, as given by Matthew and Luke, form one of the richest spiritual treasures for the Christian' (1943: 8). In the services, the poem is recited by an individual cantor alone or with assistants forming a choir (*koro*), in standard melodic and rhythmic patterns, but with plenty of scope for skilful embellishment and variation; it is divided into sections and preceded, punctuated and concluded with a variety of Arabic and Turkish prayers, Turkish hymns and verses from the Koran.

Before describing the *mevlûd* services in more detail, we must give some account of the poem itself. There are numerous published editions available in Turkey, and they vary considerably in length, structure and content.[5] Most of the editions available in the town of Eğirdir are relatively short, about 300 couplets (*beyit*). Although the texts in old Turkish script used by the traditionally-trained local cantors are continuous, in the more recent texts and in the recitals the poem is divided into a varying number of chapters or sections.

comment that the style of the poem 'is very simple, without art of any kind' (Gibb (1900) 1958: 236, quoted in MacCallum 1943: 8), MacCallum's translation does capture important elements of contemporary recitals, namely the archaic vocabulary and the sophisticated and sometimes esoteric character of the poem.

The first chapter of the poem is an invocation and hymn of praise to God's oneness and power. It ends in a couplet which acts as a refrain throughout the poem:

> If from Hell's flame you hope to find salvation,
> With grief and love repeat the Salutation.

Chapter 2 is a brief introduction to the story of Muhammad's life. It ends with the poet charging listeners to say a *fatiha* (the first sura of the Koran) for his soul. Chapter 3 mentions the earlier prophets of Islam who anticipated Muhammad's coming. Chapter 4 is the central account of the Prophet's birth. His mother, Emine, has miraculous experiences: she is surrounded by a wondrous light (*nur*), hosts of angels, a silken mattress. Then she is visited by three *houris*, supernatural creatures who tell her of the exceptional qualities of the son she is to bear. As her time arrives, the poem continues,

> 'I thirst' she cried, 'I thirst, I burn with fever!'
> A brimming glass to her at once was proffered.
> White was that glass, than snow more white, and colder;
> No sweetmeat ever made held half such sweetness.
> 'I drank it, and my being filled with glory,
> Nor could I longer self from light distinguish.'

In the next verse, as she gives birth,

> On pinions bright a bird of white came floating,
> And stroked my back, so strongly, yet how kindly;
> The Sultan of the Faith that hour was given,
> And drowned in glory lay both earth and heaven.

In chapter 5, 'Greetings', the infant Muhammad is welcomed to the world and his miraculous and superhuman nature is extolled. Chapter 6 is a further recital of the marvels attending the birth. Emine is at first distressed because she has lost her newborn son and has concluded that the angels have taken him, then finds him in a corner turned towards Mecca and praying, asking God's help on behalf of his people. In chapter 7 the story of the infant Muhammad's fluent speech is followed by other examples of his extraordinary attributes: he left no shadow but was always protected by a heavenly mist; his teeth shone so that at night a needle could be found by their light and a similar radiance from his body could light up the road for his companions, and so on.

Chapter 8 is a detailed account of the Prophet's heavenly journey. The journey occurs on the Thursday night which became the calendrical festival of the Night of Power, when the Prophet earlier received the revelation of the

instant to Jerusalem, where the souls of earlier Prophets do him honour,[6] thence they continue by a miraculous ladder into heaven whose citizens also welcome Muhammad. Wandering that night through the seven heavens, Muhammad gathers wisdom until at last he comes to a place beyond which even Gabriel dares not go. The second part of this chapter, often called Refref, recounts the final stages of Muhammad's journey into the presence of God, where he is assured of God's favour and love. Muhammad then appeals on behalf of mankind, and his plea is granted: people now have the chance of salvation.

> O Majesty, this is my sole petition—
> My people, may they be by thee accepted,
> From Truth Supreme a loving cry resounded:
> 'I grant them all to you, my friend, Muhammad!
> Your people now to you I have accorded
> My paradise I promise for their portion.'

These passages are the narrative climax of the poem, and after God's brief comment about the religious merit that will accrue to those people who perform the five daily prayers, Muhammad returns to the world in an instant. Chapter 9 is the concluding confession and prayer for mercy and for Muhammad's intercession.

Mevlüd *performances in Eğirdir*

Eğirdir is a market and administrative centre for a region of some forty villages.[7] The town itself has a population of about 9,000, brought to a total of over 12,000 by two substantial national institutions, an Army Commando School and an Orthopaedic Hospital. The town lies on the shores of a large lake, and fishing still brings a proportion of the income, but nowadays the economy of the town is based on the international export of locally grown apples.

Until the 1920's, when Ataturk created a secular republic from what remained of the Ottoman empire at the end of the first world war, Eğirdir was a poor local centre. Most of the population of the town, including a Greek minority, were involved in small-scale crafts and trade and were dominated by a few families of powerful landlords, wealthy merchants and religious leaders associated with the many religious schools in the town, which was also a centre for active branches (now closed) of the Mevlevi, Naqshbandi and Bektashi Sufi orders.

The town's development is largely due to the spread of education, improved communications in the country as a whole, and the entrepreneurial efforts of local residents themselves. The apple economy started in the 1950's and took off in the 1970's. All Eğirdir families traditionally owned orchard land outside the town, and all have benefitted to some degree from the apple boom, though large differences in wealth are now emerging. There are, in terms of socio-economic status and life-style, distinct strata that one is inclined to call 'classes', though the townspeople themselves maintain a self-image of classlessness. All but the poorest consider themselves to be 'middle class', and they deny anything in the way of 'class conflict' in the town. Eğirdir experienced no civil strife during

right or left. This seems due to the fact that there are few very rich or very poor among local people. The town's relative prosperity must be related to people's respect for hard work and education. The apparent homogeneity of the population is also due, first, to the fact that the small 'proletariat' is socially invisible (most manual labour is done by supposedly transient Kurdish immigrants from the east), and secondly, to the dense and continuous network of kinship and marriage linking the 7–8,000 locals (*yerli*, an indigenous category opposed to *yabanci* = strangers, including Kurds, bureaucrats and other outsiders such as soldiers at the Commando school and the hospital patients, whose contacts with local people are very limited). This means that individuals count as relatives people from all 'classes'. The kinship network is undoubtedly a powerful mechanism for social control; it has also served to exclude strangers of all kinds, who often find the locals unfriendly and grasping.

The townspeople are committed republicans: they have frequently chosen local officials from the main left-of-centre national political party, but they have voted predominantly for the main right-of-centre party. They are also committed Muslims and are by and large religious. The least religious people in town are said to be the high-status bureaucrat outsiders, while the most pious are reckoned to be found among the small traders and craftsmen of the bazaar (the *esnaf*).

The place of *mevlûd* performances in the Islam of the townspeople is ambiguous. They are undoubtedly a very important part of practical religious observances and everybody agrees that *mevlûds* are essentially religious (*dinî*) and spiritual (*manevî*), removed from wordly (*dünyevî*) or material *maddî*) concerns. But men in particular tend to deny that they have any great spiritual or theological significance, adopting the 'official' view of the local religious establishment according to which the poem and accompanying hymns are 'beautiful' but 'unimportant' because not Koranic; the main justification for the recitals is as occasions for Koranic readings.[8] By contrast, most women consider that their services, and particularly the rituals and hymn-singing associated with them, demonstrate that women are more caring and consciously religious than men. Women sometimes add that they need to be more religious than men because they have been told (by men of the religious establishment) that they are more sinful than men.

Townspeople are familiar with a wide range of *mevlûd* services. In any given period, individual women and men probably attend a similar number, perhaps an average of twenty or more a year. *Mevlûds* attended by men are associated with a variety of different contexts, falling into three main categories (though the distinctions are not made indigenously).[9] First, the greatest number of men's services are directly associated with death. In the evening after a funeral, a *mevlûd* will be performed in the home of the deceased. The numbers of men who attend vary with the status and sex of the dead person; all participants will be fed a traditional meal of a kind which nowadays is associated only with death and with other specifically religious contexts, such as the return of pilgrims from [illegible] anniversary of the death of a senior man, a *mevlûd* may be held in

the souls of the deceased. Secondly, the joyful life-cycle ceremonies of circumcision and marriage may be begun with a *mevlûd* performed by men. The temporal orientation of these latter services is enhanced in various ways: they are held in private houses early in the morning and are attended by few men, but are followed by a lavish ceremonial meal in which all invited guests, perhaps several hundred, will partake. These *mevlûds* are said to be held to secure God's blessing (*hayır*) for the principals and their families. Thirdly, *mevlûds* are performed on the occasion of the five *Kandils*, the major Islamic festivals recognised in most parts of Turkey, when *mevlûds* are also broadcast nationally on television; locally the services are sponsored by the town religious establishment and are held in the main mosque in association with evening prayers. Congregations of several hundred men may attend the services and some twenty to thirty local women may also be present, seated in the curtained back-portion of the mosque.

In spite of this range of social contexts, the men's *mevlûds* vary little in style. They are short and formal, allow little display of emotion, and offer little scope for cantors or sponsors to manage or vary the impact of any particular service. The recital of the poem, whether by traditionally-trained local cantors or by members of the religious establishment, is Arabicised, and it is accompanied by only a few prayers or hymns. The services may last less than half an hour and their muted religiosity sometimes amounts to little more than a gesture to local conventions.

Mevlûds for women almost always occur in the context of death—immediately after a funeral, and then on any or all of the following occasions: the 7th, the 40th, the 52nd days after death, and annually on the anniversary. They are held in private houses where invited congregations may vary from a dozen women to a hundred or more, averaging around fifty. Cantors are most often traditionally-trained local women, but are occasionally younger women trained in the more 'orthodox'/'masculine' manner of government-sponsored religious schools. For all these female cantors, the congregation *must* include only women, no men being allowed within earshot. Less frequently, a male cantor, usually a member of the local religious establishment, is engaged for a women's service.[10] So, while men only ever hear male cantors, women have opportunities to hear both female and male cantors. Women's own *mevlûds* are highly varied in style, from those in the women's meeting houses (described below) to those sung by male cantors and similar to the services they would hold for men. Generally, the women's *mevlûds* present a longer and more complicated structure, and a *mevlûd* hostess is very aware of the range of choices open to her, in terms of the cantors she may choose, the types of performances she may sponsor, the hospitality she may offer and the ambience of the gathering she may create.

Women's mevlûds

We now describe in some detail the type of women's *mevlûd* service that often follows women's Friday prayer meetings. Such services are both the longest

town. They are also much the most common form of *mevlûd* in which women participate. For these reasons we treat them as a standard against which other services can be judged. In doing this, our point of view as ethnographers coincides with the townspeople's (men's and women's) own ideas of these services, which some men consider to verge on heresy because of their Sufi-like emotionalism but which most women feel to be laudable expressions of piety.

We begin with a very brief summary of the women's Friday morning prayer meetings which precede the *mevlûds*. These prayer meetings are characterised by rituals which emphasise both the uniqueness of each individual woman and her complete equality with all other members of the congregation. The continuities and contrasts between these disciplined and self-effacing rituals and the personalised warmth of the *mevlûd* services that follow are a basic part of the ritual dynamic.

The women's Friday prayer meetings, or *tasbih namaz*, are held in two or three private houses simultaneously. Congregations at each of these religious meeting houses (*hoca evi*) seem to be quite stable and average forty to fifty mostly middle-aged or elderly women drawn from a wide variety of indigenous (*yerli*) families. The traditionally-trained local women prayer leaders (*hoca*) and the women of the congregations make their way to a meeting house at mid-morning. As they walk through the back streets, they greet and are greeted by all other women they meet with the short handshake ritual of 'Friday greeting' (*Cuma mubarak*). If she has not done so at home, a woman on entering the meeting house performs a ritual ablution (*abdest*) and dons a large white scarf which covers her hair, neck and shoulders. Then she quietly but systematically greets all the women already present according to the greeting ritual before finding a place for herself on the floor. Each woman then begins to chant a *zikr*, or formula of litanies glorifying God, to her rosary (*tasbih*); these devotions continue for some 45 minutes against a background of tape-recorded religious songs and sermons.

Around 11.00 a.m. the *hoca* begins the formal *tasbih namaz*: after introductory prayers there are four *rakat* of unison prayers lasting nearly an hour. The prayers are quite strenuous. The prayer positions are those of the prescribed Islamic devotions (*namaz* or *salât*), but at each position the *hoca* leads the *tasbih* chant such that by the end of the prayer session 300 *tasbih* have been repeated.[11] Finally further short Arabic prayers and a unison chant of the 99 names of God complete the service.

If there is to be a *mevlûd* afterwards, the congregation will be invited to stay on and join other guests; the *mevlûd* sponsor provides a simple lunch for all. Then, after midday prayers, the women crowd round to find places on the floor near the cantor (*mevlûdhan*), who also sits on the floor in the place of honour at the back of the room. The cantor, the prayer leader of the morning, is likely to be joined by one or two other women as *koro* to sing the *mevlûd* with her and both lighten the work of the recital and add to the richness of the performance.

The recitation of the poem is divided into five sections (see fig. 1), separated [illegible] prayers and Koran readings. The service begins with a

congregation, who are much encouraged to participate and are believed to gain additional religious merit (*sevab*) by doing so. It is not unusual for four or five suras, sometimes the same ones, to be recited at a single interval. Other elements which punctuate the performance are the *fatiha* (the first sura of the Koran), the *salâvat* blessing and the *selâm* greetings to the Prophet, while yet other Arabic prayers are typically followed by a Turkish translation: for instance, a performance usually begins with an Arabic, then Turkish, prayer of donation and dedication, for the soul of the dead person commemorated by the service, for the soul of Muhammad, and for God's approval or acceptance of this intention (*niyyet*). A final element consists of hymns (*ilahi* or *kaside*), one or two of which are sung before the recital of the *mevlûd* poem itself, between sections and especially at the end of the service. The repertoire of local cantors probably numbers some forty or fifty of these hymns. Members of the congregation may join in the singing *sotto voce* and indeed are often encouraged to sing on their own. The *ilahi* most commonly used to begin both women's and men's services is the well-known '*Gelin Allah diyelim*'. The sentiments of this and the other hymns are simple and positive: worshippers may cleanse their hearts and turn to God; happy images, drawn widely from the Islamic tradition, express nearness to God and hopes of salvation. Their effect is to make the religion of the *mevlûd* experience immediate and personal. Cantors consciously enhance this effect by choosing hymns that will catch and deepen the mood and atmosphere of each particular gathering, which at one extreme may be held on the day of a tragic and unexpected death, or at the other may commemorate the death in old age of long-departed parents or grandparents.

Lack of space precludes a complete description of the service here, and we confine ourselves to mentioning some of the main aspects in which these women's *mevlûds*, which are the kind most frequently attended by women whether at the meeting house or in a private home, differ from those sung and attended by men whether in the mosques or in a private home.

FIGURE 1. Women's and men's *mevlûds* – divisions of the text.

MacCallum's translation		*Women cantors' recitals*		*Men cantor's recitals*	
Chapters	Couplets	Sections	couplets	Sections	couplets
I Invocation to God	18	I	18	I	10
II Introduction	4			II	7
III The prophetic succession	11	II	55	—	—
IV The birth of Muhammad	36			III	20
V (Greetings to Muhammad)	22	III	49	—	—
VI (Marvels)	20			—	—
VII Miracles of Allah's apostle	9			—	—
(Later miracles)	19			—	—
VIII Heavenly journey of Allah's apostle	65	IV	58	IV	27
(Refref)	35				
IX The petition	10	V	37	—	—

A comparison of women's and men's mevlûds

The pattern of division into chapters or sections differs widely between women and men. In fig. 1 the conventional chapter divisions used by MacCallum are followed to show the main differences between women's and men's performances more clearly.

The first couplet of the poem, in all the published texts and in the version sung by men, is invocatory:

> Allah! This name invoke we in beginning,
> For this is ever due from us, his servants.

Yet here, at the very start, local women cantors depart from convention and begin with a couplet in which the intercessionary role of the pure believer is emphasised:

> That man is pure who on the pure name calleth;
> Who cries: Allah! attains his every purpose.[12]

Further, the standard refrain (see above, p. 74) with its dire warning of hellfire, is converted by women, but not men, into a much more positive injunction:

> If you seek to find a sublime place,
> Lovingly repeat the Salutation.

The second section of the women's recitals, focusing on the Birth of the Prophet, is performatively the most elaborate part of their *mevlûds*. As the time of birth approaches, Emine cries out with thirst and is offered sweet ice-cold water which fills her with light and joy; at recitals commemorating a very recent death, tall glasses of sugar water or very sweet lemonade (*cennet şerbeti*, lit. heavenly cordial) are then given to the congregation (though on other occasions, for both men and women, packages of sweets may be distributed, 'for respect (*hürmet*)', in their place). Then, at the moment of birth, when the white bird comes and strokes Emine's back, all the women stand facing Mecca, while the cantor sprinkles rosewater over them. The women then imitate both Emine and the white bird: they are in any case covered with waist-length diaphanous white prayer scarves and they now move through the room stroking each other on the back. When the flurry of movement and contact is over, women return to their places and the cantor recites the standing prayer (*ayak duası*), a prayer for the intercession of the Prophet in the lives of the congregation, which links images of birth with Muhammad's night journey to heaven. For women, the birth section of the *mevlûd* may be one of several highpoints. For men, this moment is the climax of the *mevlûd* but is marked simply by the congregation standing at the moment of birth and the sprinkling of rosewater and distribution of sweets by assistants; there is no physical contact or other movement among men.

In the third section of the women's *mevlûds* the infant Muhammad is greeted with elaborate praises, while the women move about the room and greet each other, repeating a briefer version of the Friday greeting. A particularly compel-

manhood is captured in two couplets (not in the printed texts or MacCallum) in which his sweat is described as rosewater, more fragrant than musk or amber. Rosewater, which is traditionally associated with the Prophet, was earlier used to bring the congregation into direct contact with the miraculous birth and the superhuman babe; here the contact is verbal but vivid, and later, in the chapter on the night journey, rosewater again is sprinkled over the congregation. All of the third (greetings) section of the women's *mevlûds* and the associated rituals are missing from the men's *mevlûds*.

The conclusion of the poem is followed by a Turkish *mevlûd* prayer. This prayer is long; women cantors consider that anything shorter would be lightweight and diminish the impact of the poem. The prayer is a direct petition to God for the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of the *mevlûd* and it ends, as the poem itself begins, with a plea that the true believers—'those who say Amin'—be spared the pains of hell. The women then tighten their scarves modestly and chant in unison a powerful *zikr* which is the emotional climax of the service; in the past it seems likely that it was more dramatic and ecstatic than it is at present. The men's services too end in elaborate prayers in Arabic and Turkish, long by comparison with the attenuated men's recital of the poem, but shorter than in the women's services, and missing any *zikr*.

In contrast with the austerity of the morning prayer ritual, the emotionality of the women's meeting house *mevlûds* is often expressed in tears and explained by the women in terms of their love or passion (*aşk*) for God and Mohammad. Though by no means all women of a congregation will necessarily cry during a particular performance, both the cantor herself and others of the congregation may cry at virtually any point during the service and on some occasions a few women may quietly weep throughout a recital. More dramatic are the much rarer occasions when a woman falls into a short trance or trance-like state, when she becomes agitated and ecstatic (*coş*). These states are spontaneous and individual and may occur at any time. It is interesting that such intense emotional states may be verbally linked with a particularly moving recital, where the whole congregation may be said to have become excited (*coş*), even though no woman may have come near a trance-like state. None of these emotional manifestations is found at the men's *mevlûds*, and men tend to deplore the women's emotion as excessive melancholy (*hüzün*) and their songs as dirges (*ağıt*).

Some of the rituals associated with the Eğirdir *mevlûds* are part of a ritual repertoire which the women see, quite self-consciously, as setting the community apart from others in the region. Other aspects of the local *mevlûd* services suggest links which may create a homogeneity in Turkish Islam and provide a broad social base for religious innovation and the preservation of ritual traditions. For example, the hymns known and sung by local people have been culled from a variety of local, regional and national sources and the repertoire is always changing. At both local and other levels *mevlûd* performances have a momentum of their own. *Mevlûd* services led by the same cantor may vary in detail, lending a spontaneity to each performance and avoiding any sense of formalisa-

that in practice the rituals which celebrate this mystery most frequently and directly are those of the *mevlûd* service and that for the townspeople this service itself both asserts the truth of their beliefs and denies the paradox which is implicit in it.

The similarities between women's and men's services make it possible for people to speak of them in some contexts as identical in intention, form and content, and allow the sharing of ideals and sentiments that, despite official disapproval, continue to constitute important elements in the practical Islam of Republican Turkey. Differences between the services, on the other hand, reflect and perpetuate a continuing sexual division of religious and political labour and thereby sustain a more complex religious culture than might otherwise be possible. In this respect men's *mevlûd*s seem to act automatically as conduits for conveying the generalised blessings of God on the souls of particularly notable dead men, on children (during circumcision and marriage ceremonies) and on the state (during celebrations of the annual religious festivals). Men's *mevlûd*s focus on the temporal aspects of social reproduction and their efforts seem designed principally to introduce a supernatural dimension into everyday life and values. By contrast, women's *mevlûd* services fulfil a more dramatic function. In their services, which almost always occur in the context of death, women create and confirm the promise of individual salvation which is offered to all Muslims. The women's *mevlûd*s do this by exalting childbirth and using an ideal of motherhood to establish an intimate link between the *mevlûd* participants and the Prophet Muhammad.[15]

The road to salvation: Islamic and Christian alternatives

As Padwick writes, 'No one can estimate the power of Islam as a religion who does not take into account the love at the heart of it for the [Prophet Muhammad]' (1961: 45); yet the extent to which the Prophet is the focus of ritual and belief varies considerably between Muslim communities. This variation remains largely unstudied, but it seems likely that the prominence of the Turkish *mevlûd* services may be related to the historical contact between Muslims and Christians in the area. Certainly such a consideration is relevant in a town such as Eğirdir which, until the population exchanges of the 1920's, had a substantial Greek Orthodox community and where Muslim identity even today is often construed by way of a contrast with Christianity. It seems to us that key aspects of Turkish religious ritual and belief, such as those associated with the *mevlûd*, were constructed in a context that included understandings of the rites and beliefs of Christians. This clearly deserves much further study, and only a few suggestions can be offered here.

The origins of the popular *mevlûd* recitals of Turkey are obscure, but they were, as their name suggests, associated with the celebrations of the Prophet's [illegible] which by 1688 had become institutionalised in the Ottoman empire [illegible]

might be considered with regard to the Turkish *mevlûd* (and indeed other Muslim *mawlid*, see e.g. McPherson 1941). The anthropological discussions of virgin birth are well-known, but Muslim variations on the theme, such as those found in the *mevlûd*, are less familiar.[16] In many Muslim communities the Prophet's ancestry is unimportant, while his spiritual genealogy (the Prophets who preceded him) and the pedigrees of his myriad descendants are the basis on which most claims to spiritual (and often social) precedence are made. In Christianity, by contrast, both Christ's human descent (through Joseph) in the house of David and his divine origin (as the son of God) are of the greatest importance and indeed define the miracle of his parthenogenetic birth; Christ however had no descendants, only spiritual successors.[17] In the Turkish *mevlûd*, an extreme form of the Muslim paradigm appears as a transformation of the Christian one. Muhammad's birth too is treated here as parthenogenesis:[18] the relation between mother and child is elaborately described, but, while Mohammad's spiritual genealogy is recounted, there is no mention of his father or other kin, nor of his own roles as husband and father. Though we know little as yet of the sources of this construction of the Prophet in the *mevlûd*, it both creates a contrast between the figures of Christ and Muhammad, and at the same time fosters an idealised construction of motherhood and of women's spiritual nature not unlike aspects of the image of the Virgin Mary in Greek Orthodoxy.[19]

The second main element of the *mevlûd*, the journey to heaven, is in its turn a structural transformation of the Christian Easter story. In simple terms, where Jesus died, descended into hell, interceded for mankind, three days later rose from the dead and returned to his followers only to leave them soon after and ascend to heaven, Muhammad was transported one night in an instant to heaven, interceded on behalf of Muslims, and returned to join his followers and continue his mission.[20]

While the subject of the *mevlûd* is birth, childbirth is one occasion in the life-cycle when (at least in Eğirdir) *mevlûd*s are rarely performed. Indeed, rituals after birth are simple and have a strongly secular, domestic flavour, which points a further strong contrast with the central and complex rites of Baptism and Chrism associated with birth among the Orthodox Greeks.

In death rituals too, Turkish practices differ radically from those of the Greeks. Muslim burial ceremonies, though often sparse, are by no means uniform even within Turkey. In the case of Eğirdir, once again it does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that the present-day beliefs and practices were constructed in some degree as a contrast with those of the earlier Greek Christian population. Townspeople continue to be fascinated and horrified by what is recalled of the mourning rituals and secondary burial practices the Greek community used to observe.[21] Their own rites are simple, even severe. All corpses are buried within a day of death, and the funeral rituals, though they recognise gender differences, do not focus on them but on the inevitable mortality of all living things. Indeed, by emphasising the uniformity of death, the rituals deny any randomness in its occurrence or the unique circumstances of any particular case. After burial, little attention is paid either to the grave itself or

when certain prayers become stale they are deliberately replaced. Moreover it is perfectly acceptable for individual members of a women's congregation to introduce into the service changes they have learned from elsewhere.

Finally, we argue that the elaborate women's *mevlûd*s provide women who accept traditional definitions of gender roles a rare and valued opportunity for self-expression and leadership outside the household. For many women, *mevlûd*s provide one of the few occasions when they visit outside the houses of their immediate kin and neighbours.[13] And, in contrast to the men's *mevlûd*s, the women's gatherings provide opportunities both before and afterwards for quiet conversation and gossip. As we might expect (cf. Hoch-Smith & Spring 1978), women prayer leaders and cantors play a particularly sensitive social role: they command personal respect, have wide networks and are outspoken in their comments on both religious topics and community affairs generally. Nancy Tapper has argued elsewhere (1983), that *mevlûd*s, as intense religious experiences which focus on birth and motherhood, emphasise relations of equality among women and create and reinforce relations of support among them. The variation between different types of *mevlûd*s sponsored by women strengthens this argument. Some women whose education, economic and/or marital status links them closely to the secular ideals of the Turkish Republic have either a certain independence outside the home or at least a sense of equality or shared identity with men; they may not need and certainly do not seek the opportunities for self-expression or consolation and support offered by the more elaborate women's *mevlûd*s. And they may even feel that such *mevlûd*s undermine or invalidate their more 'modern' secular identity. Such women seem to adopt a view of religious obligations and experience which approaches that of most men; by sponsoring *mevlûd*s sung by male cantors, they implicitly reject the exaltation of women's fertility and special relation with the supernatural realm.

Thus, the details of variation in the *mevlûd* services in Eğirdir reflect gender and status differences in a number of ways. As we saw earlier, the range of contexts in which services are held is much wider for men than women. Men and women have different views of the purpose and value of the services. Most men view them as an appropriate vehicle for Koran readings and teaching about the life of the Prophet. Men suggest that the night journey to heaven is the most important part of the narrative biography, in spite of the fact that this is treated briefly and with no particular emphasis in their performances, whose climax comes in the section on the Prophet's birth. Most women consider the *mevlûd* service in its entirety to be an important act of piety, and they refuse to treat any one aspect of the service as more meritorious than others. But perhaps the most important differences between men's and women's *mevlûd*s are in the style, length, structure, complexity and emotionality of the actual performances.

more elaborate than those by and for men, they are correspondingly remote from religious forms approved by the establishment.

In Ottoman Turkey, religious enthusiasm and involvement in the activities of the Sufi brotherhoods played an important role in the lives of the townspeople and complemented their commitment to formal religious learning and rituals. Shortly after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, these brotherhoods were banned, and in the ensuing decades women's religious performances, like men's, were subject to constant official scrutiny. Women say that in those days ecstatic expression was dangerous and that their Friday prayer-meetings were held in secret in a different house each week in order to avoid detection. Even now, all religious gatherings in private houses are legally banned, but people consider it unlikely that a women's gathering would be raided today, though raids remain a real threat to other kinds of private religious gatherings. That is, there is still a sense in which both women and men fear to participate in any but the most 'orthodox' religious activities.

Today religious expression is severely limited and many traditional religious forms have been redefined in secularist terms as 'ignorant superstitions' antithetic to the state-controlled religious orthodoxies.[14] Those who are to participate fully in the modern state must now be seen to have shed such 'superstitions': this particularly applies to men, who continue to have more to do with public affairs and the state than women. Despite appreciable changes in gender relations and in their social, legal and political status since Ottoman times (cf. N. Tapper 1985), women are still, especially in towns like Eğirdir, strongly associated with the privacy of domestic life. Men become both guardians and actors of the state-established orthodoxy, while women, particularly in their *mevlûd* services, preserve a domain of religious enthusiasm, reworking old forms as symbolic vehicles for defining relations between women and men, man and God, the local community and the state. In this respect, the privacy of the women's *mevlûd*s may be an important vehicle for religious sentiments that cannot be expressed more publicly by men, who nonetheless maintain links with this alternative religiosity through their own *mevlûd* services.

As Turkish Islam has become less mystical, more individualistic and more mosque-centred, there has been a change in the intrinsic balance between religious goals, from those which were both emotional and otherworldly to others which emphasise temporal life, sobriety and social morality (cf. Fallers 1971). In other words, it is perhaps not accidental that in lessons and sermons at the mosque, and in the religious literature associated with official Turkish Islam today, there is little emphasis on the fundamental Islamic goal of salvation. In the religious lives of the townspeople, a great part of their thoughts and energy is directed towards the problem of behaving morally in this life in the hope of achieving an eternal life in paradise, but much of this activity is of a calculating, mechanical kind. Both men and women will deliberately seek, through set prayers or specific good works, to acquire quantities of merit (*sevab*) to offset the quantities of sin (*günah*) they may have committed. Such manipulative attitudes are fostered by the religious establishment and are compatible with the capitalist [illegible] Turkey. Nonetheless, the possibility that ordinary

Rather, attention focuses on the comfort and fate of the soul from the point of death until the Day of Judgement. Sorrow and mourning are severely discouraged (women say, 'if you cry, the pain will be the deceased's not yours'), and the bereaved are encouraged to help themselves and the soul of the deceased through positive ritual activities. Of the range of such rituals, *mevlûds* are by far the most important and their central message is unambiguous: death can be overcome by seeking Muhammad's intercession with God, the acknowledged source of all creation. The purpose of *mevlûds* is often explicitly stated to be the road to salvation or release (*kurtuluş yolu* or *vesîletün-necât*).[22]

The townspeople's understanding of the promise of salvation is similar to that of Christians, but Islamic theology presents them with a rather different set of problems from those posed by Christian doctrine. Christ is God become man in a miraculous birth; his crucifixion, descent into hell, and resurrection, are the means through which God offers believers hope of salvation. The Christian mystery involves identification with God the Son in his self-sacrifice.[23] In Islam, God's promise has been communicated to believers through the revealed word of the Koran via the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet was unambiguously born of man and woman, and unambiguously and finally died; his humanity and mortality are a basic and insistent part of Islam's severe monotheism and identify him with all other believers, but in this respect his mediatory role is passive and dependent, offering no model to disguise the paradox at the heart of the salvation promise: how can ordinary people of this world be transformed into immortals in paradise? Indeed, without further miraculous credentials, a sceptic might fairly ask what guarantees there are that one mere man's words are more valid than those of any other. In many Islamic constructions, as with current orthodoxy in Turkey, the status of the word of the Koran is such that it should preclude doubts about the promise of salvation and become the basis of rituals through which salvation may be attained. In Turkey, however, as in some other parts of the Muslim world, traditionally there has been a strong alternative focus on the Prophet himself as a model of and for salvation.[24] If Muhammad is allowed a special, super-human status, then his message becomes credible and the salvation paradox may also be resolved. *Mevlûd* services effect just this latter type of reconciliation: they allow each participant to identify with the man and, at the same time, recreate the Prophet's life in terms which clearly stress the miracles of his birth, character and experiences such as the night journey to heaven. Particularly in the women's *mevlûds*, which may be seen as expressions of a humanised Islam, contact with the Prophet has a compelling intimacy. It is almost as if heaven is created on earth, if only temporarily, at each women's service.

We argue that the salvationist message is particularly strong in the women's religious culture which has, perhaps by default, acquired such an emphasis because of the restrictive controls the secular state has imposed on men's religious activities generally. That is, the women seem to have become the repositories of spiritual values to which both women and men subscribe but which, paradoxically, only women can experience with performative immediacy because of their inferior status vis-à-vis past and present religious establishments.[25] The paradox is most clearly seen in the men's disparagement

of the women's *mevlûd* services in which they nonetheless tolerate and even encourage the participation of women of their own households.

Gender constructions and ideologies of death and rebirth

Recent studies of mortuary ritual (Huntington & Metcalf 1979) and of ideologies of death and rebirth (Bloch & Parry 1982) have reminded us how often symbols of sexuality and fertility are associated with death and mourning. Bloch argues that in systems of traditional authority,

> there will, as Hertz had noted, always be a double aspect to funerals. One side will focus on pollution and sorrow, something which in the end has to be removed and another side will always assert the continuity of something else, a reassertion of the vanquishing and victorious order where authority has its legitimate place. This reassertion is what necessitates the negation of the processes of death (and therefore of birth) and the reaffirmation of the eternal order where birth and death are overcome by representing them as the same thing and where therefore everything is fixed for ever and ever (Bloch 1982: 224).

This duality is created in various ways in different cultures: double funerals; differential treatment of flesh and bones; a distinction between ancestral soul and individual destiny, or between body and soul. Very commonly,

> the devalued side, the side of decomposition, is . . . acted out by being associated with women while the other side—the eternal order of traditional authority . . . —is associated either with men or with the group as an undifferentiated entity (Bloch 1982: 225–6).

Women are the mourners. In the Mediterranean area 'Again and again women are *given* death while the social order is reaffirmed elsewhere' (1982: 226). Funerary ceremonies act out

> not only the victory over death but the victory over the physical, biological nature of man as a whole. Birth and death and often sexuality are declared to be an illusion, located in the world of women, and true life, fertility, is therefore elsewhere. This is why funerary rituals are an occasion for fertility. This is fertility dispensed by authority, whether it be that of the elders or of the priests, while in the meantime women are left holding the corpse (Bloch 1982: 227).

The Turkish material supports the general tenor of Bloch's argument, but presents very different symbolic and ritual configurations from those he considers. First, the funeral rituals in the town and people's understanding of death show no emphasis on the pollution of corpses, and attention is focussed on the soul rather than the body of the deceased. Secondly, there is no direct association between death and women's sexuality. The *mevlûds*, which figure prominently in both women's and men's mourning ceremonies, do focus explicitly on birth, and might hence appear to collapse death and birth and deny their biological nature, as Bloch suggests; but in all *mevlûd* services, especially in the ritual elaborations performed by the women, motherhood is exalted in spiritual terms, while the birth of the Prophet is treated as parthenogenesis, both elements thus denying any connexion between human sexuality and salvation. (Noticeably, too, *mevlûds* are one of the very few types of women's gatherings where children are not welcome; their presence is felt to lead to distraction and

impiety and women leave them at home whenever possible.) Further, *mevlûds* are also associated with both male and female sexuality in the life-cycle ceremonies of circumcision and marriage, but these *mevlûds* are specifically a male affair, and are linked explicitly with temporal concerns, serving to reinforce gender stereotypes and the concomitant segregation of women's and men's religious activities. We suggest that only in such a system, which involves a strict sexual division of religious labour but which does *not* associate women's sexuality with death pollution, is it possible for childbirth and motherhood to be so idealised and used to validate the salvation promise, and for women, rather than men, to assert central beliefs in the continuity between temporal life and a life hereafter.

In this article we have shown, first that practised versions of Islam are complex and combine ritual austerity with elements which are not necessarily 'fundamentally aniconic, amythical and commemorative or traditionalist' (as Graham would have it, 1983: 66); and, secondly, that ritual and gender may be so related in a Muslim community that the differences between women's and men's versions of an Islamic tradition may express and legitimate both women's and men's beliefs in key religious mysteries. Our demonstration is modest and may not be directly relevant elsewhere; but we insist that an intrinsic relation between gender and religious orthodoxy is a characteristic of practised Islam everywhere, and that the elucidation of this relation must be central to any anthropology of Islam.

NOTES

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 1985 conference of the British Society for Middle East Studies at Edinburgh, and read at seminars at Washington University, St Louis, and the London School of Economics. We are grateful for the many helpful comments received on these occasions. Our thanks are also due to Stephen Barton and Hastings Donnan who read and commented on the article.

[1] Compare our earlier discussions of these issues, R. Tapper (1979: 14; 1984) and Tapper & Tapper (1986).

[2] An 'anthropology of Islam' is very different from the kind of 'Islamic anthropology' advocated by Ahmed who, while decrying 'the notorious ethnocentricity of much of Western anthropology' (1984: 3), scarcely makes a better case for an alternative explicitly based on an ideological commitment.

[3] See Stirrat's (1984) discussion of varieties of sacred models.

[4] The most informative analyses are those of Edmonds (1969) and Toygar (1982) but these are unfortunately brief and cannot be considered sociological.

[5] Textual variations are the subject of some scholarly studies (e.g. Aymutlu 1958; A. Ateş 1956; Pekolcay 1980). Other variations are virtually untreated: these consist in the ritual actions, prayers and hymns that punctuate and emphasise parts of the narrative poem (cf. Timurtaş 1980: xix; Aymutlu 1958: 59–60; and the short bibliography of practices associated with *mevlûd* performances in A. Ateş 1954: 20); equally, Toygar's useful article (1982) barely touches on the internal differences between *mevlûd* performances.

[6] The theological problems posed by the idea of *isra*, Muhammad's night journey, and *miraj*, Muhammad's ascension to heaven are well known (see Schrieke 1961: 183–4; Horovitz 1961: 381 sqq. and Buhl 1961: 405 sqq.), but the popular conflation of these ideas has been little discussed, though such a duplication of events is of course typical of mythical structures elsewhere (cf. Leach 1983). The central importance of the night of ascension in practised Islam is made clear by Padwick who writes of the Koranic verses which refer to that spiritual experience as 'the nexus between the whole system of Islam and the inner life of the mystics. They, and the whole embroidery of tradition on them, are also the food of the simple' (1961: 141).

[7] Our fieldwork in Turkey was done jointly. Preparations were begun in 1979, after which we spent some fifteen months in Turkey, completing the field research in November 1984. Nancy Tapper's research was an SSRC/ESRC Project (HR 7410). Richard Tapper was supported by grants from the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Nuffield Foundation and the ESRC (HR 8851). Our gratitude and obligation to our sponsors, to the authorities and to countless private individuals in Turkey are considerable and will be acknowledged more fully in a later publication. For further information on the study see N. Tapper (1983; 1985) and Tapper & Tapper (1987).

[8] The three prayer manuals most widely known and available to the townspeople (S. Ateş n.d.; Soymen 1979; and Tavaslı n.d.) hardly even mention the *Mevlûd Kandili*, the religious festival commemorating the Prophet's birth. In these manuals this *kandil* is associated with fewer ritual duties (*ibadet*) than the other calendrical festivals. Nor do the manuals make any mention at all of the popular recitals of the *mevlûd* poem, apart from Ateş's suggestion (n.d.: 133) of a *hatim* prayer which might also be said at such rituals. In other words, in these official/quasi-official publications, both the festival and the popular recitals are very obviously played down. In spite of this, copies of the poem, hymn books and other relevant publications are readily available in local bookshops, though few townspeople are familiar with this literature.

Mevlûd performances, like other religious services in the town, are conducted in a mixture of Arabic and Turkish. Very few women or men, and only some of the religious teachers themselves, have even a rudimentary literal understanding of the Arabic used, though the teachers can of course read the Arabic script fluently. In the case of the most familiar Arabic prayers, such as the *fatiha*, most people have some idea of their general meaning, but the meaning of less familiar prayers or Koranic suras is other than literal. As a very general rule the Arabic content of rituals seems to stand for 'orthodoxy'; and the more Arabic there is, the more acceptable is the ritual to the religious establishment. By contrast, the Turkish prayers and hymns and the *mevlûd* poem itself are by and large understood by a congregation and must be treated as texts whose literal meaning believers themselves can interpret; they are both an explicit part of the religious ideology as well as a dimension of ritual with implicit meanings.

[9] Toygar (1982: 520–1) lists a wide range of life-cycle and other occasions when *mevlûds* may be performed in some parts of Turkey, though only a few of them are so marked in Eğirdir.

[10] Male cantors, who are usually government-appointed religious officials associated with the town mosques, receive as a tip (they say fees are illegal) 1–2,000 TL (£3–6 in 1983) for *mevlûd* recitals. Women cantors are rarely given more than 500 TL for a recital, but the women helpers may also receive several hundred lira each. The differences in cost seem irrevelant to the kind of service women choose to sponsor.

[11] See Ateş (n.d.: 65–6) and the somewhat clearer and more comprehensive account of the *tasbih namaz* in Tavaslı (n.d.: 28 sqq., 169 sqq.). These prayer manuals suggest that this supererogatory act of prayer is associated with great religious merit (*sevab*) and that all Muslims should aspire to perform the ritual at least once in their lifetime. Beyond saying that the ritual has considerable merit, the women never elaborated on their regular participation in this service. The *tasbih namaz* is very occasionally performed by men in the mosque, but we failed to ask how they viewed their participation.

[12] One of the published versions of the poem available in the town also implicitly suggests the importance of the *mevlûd* as a vehicle of intercession. Though this version begins with the standard invocatory couplet, on the cover of the booklet the single couplet with which the women's recitals begin is reproduced in large letters (Sağlam 1981).

[13] Toygar notes that *mevlûds* are particularly important for women; this he says is because women are more religious than men, because the main point of the *mevlûd* for women is to explain birth and because it provides an opportunity for individual secluded women to congregate socially; but he suggests that worship remains the chief interest and that the social function of the *mevlûds* is secondary to their religious purpose for women (1982: 523).

[14] See Jacob's excellent study (1982) of the relation between religion, religious education and the state. It should be noted that in the period since our fieldwork restrictions on religious expression are reported to have been relaxed, while in certain areas pressures to observe the outward forms of Islam (fasting, modest dress for women, etc.) have considerably increased.

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What? Me Worry About Language Learning?

Greg Thomson

Tuesday, May 4, 1993

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